

# Odyssey Oracle

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Special Edition:

Women with the Courage to Write



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*They were women then  
My mamma's generation  
Husky of voice—Stout of step  
With fists as well as  
Hands  
How they battered down  
Doors . . .  
To discover books  
Desks  
A place for us  
How they knew what we  
Must know  
Without knowing a page  
Of it  
Themselves —Alice Walker*



Alice Walker's "Women" tells us that her mamma's generation was strong. They helped in the household by taking care of their men and themselves. They have paved the way for the next generation of women with action, not books. To me Alice Walker's "Women" tells us that our mothers have done a lot for men and women of these days by the way they lived their lives. . . .  
**(Donta Starr)**

Alice Walker's "Women" caught my attention because what she described was my mom, Henriette Owens. She singlehandedly raised my two brothers, two sisters, and myself. She was rough and stubborn and didn't take any mess from anybody. I used to think she was the meanest woman alive, but I realize she had to be that way being a single black woman living in



the hood trying to raise five children.

Alice Walker's description of women was very vivid and well written; in fact, you can picture these strong, stout women taking control of situations and doing whatever it takes to feed their family and pay the rent. The poem reminded me of the character Sophia in her novel *The Color Purple*.

(Eugene Smalls)

*If I can stop one Heart from  
breaking*

*I shall not live in vain*

*If I can ease one Life the  
Aching*

*Or cool one Pain*

*Or help one fainting Robin*

*Unto his Nest again*

*I shall not live in vain.—Emily Dickinson*



I read the "I shall not live in vain" poem by Emily Dickinson. What I really grabbed from it was that you shall not live in dishonesty but live in an honest, helpful, giving way so as not to hurt others. It basically broke down to somebody having a huge heart. I really liked this poem

and its meaning. It made me rethink and realize that there are decent people in the world who care not just about themselves but others around them.

(Bradley Barner)

In the *Highlights* article "Emily Dickinson, Poems from a Room," Emily Auerbach speaks of how Emily Dickinson longed to be able to help those in need—how her life would not be in vain if she could stop someone's heart from breaking.

To me this is powerful. But if she chose not to leave her room, how could she save a robin from fainting and then help him to his nest again? Maybe she was suffering from some kind of depression. Creating stories and poems can ease the aching pain from



life. I see later in the article she refers to her room as "Freedom." Living in a world with so many people, so much stress, and too much tyranny can cause someone to seek shelter, stability, and mostly comfort. (Arnella Royal)



*There is no Frigate like a Book  
To take us Lands away  
Nor any Coursers like a Page  
Of prancing Poetry . . .*

—Emily Dickinson



Emily Dickinson enjoyed reading. Reading was a way of escape from everyday life. Dickinson had an extraordinary imagination. Emily Dickinson was a giver who loved to write beautiful poems and send them to her friends. She forces her readers to reconsider what

they might call a sanctuary. Her place of peace or sanctuary was her room. Emily Dickinson found life in her poetry, which she continued to write until she passed away.

I personally believe there is beauty and life in writing like Emily Dickinson. When I am able to clearly articulate myself through my writing, I am excited and can write for hours. Emily Dickinson's story is unique because most people would not be satisfied with sitting in a room just writing, but she was so happy with life. That's awesome. She had a wonderful gift of writing poetry. (Kenya Moses)

*Bee! I'm expected you!*

*Was saying Yesterday*

*To Somebody you know*

*That you were due—*

*The Frogs got Home last Week—. . .*

*Yours, Fly.—Emily Dickinson*

I've always been a fan of Emily Dickinson. Her poems enlighten the mind, they inspire the soul, and they are fun. Emily Dickinson's poems are truly graceful. She's able to bring us in on the journey and let us join in the fun. Her sense of humor is



very nice. For example, in the poem where she's a fly writing a letter to a bee, she's able to grasp the moment and let us in. The fly lets the bee know everything that's going on and what he's missing. Emily Dickinson gives the mind a nice ride full of beautiful

things. I love her work. She's simply amazing!  
(Terry Hart)

*The house is old, the trees are bare  
And moonless bends the misty dome  
But what on earth is half so dear—  
So longed for as the hearth of home? . . .* —Emily Brontë



Reading the *Highlights* article about the Brontë sisters reminded me of when I was a child. Like their younger brother, I had toy action figures (or in his case toy soldiers). I would often rename my action figures and given them alternate roles, origins, and super powers that differed from

the comic books or cartoons. Like the Brontës, this allowed me to develop my imagination and would eventually ignite my interest in the written word and story writing. (Brandon McCarey)

*. . . And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being! “Free! Body and soul free!” she kept whispering. . .* —Kate Chopin



Kate Chopin's "Story of an Hour" (1894) tells of a woman's reaction to being told by her sister and her husband's friend that her husband was killed in a train accident. She grieves immediately and then retreats to her room alone. In her room she is overcome with the sights and sounds of life

around her and realizes how her husband's death has set her free. Now she will be able to experience life for herself and not have to bend to anyone else's will. At the end of the story is a twist: when her husband walks in the front door unharmed, she dies right there of heart disease. "From joy," the doctors say, but most likely it is from the loss of her newfound freedom.

I love how this story told so much in such a short time. When Chopin describes the things the woman is hearing and seeing around her, I could also see and hear those things just like I was there. It's almost like Louise is born again in the story, like a huge weight is lifted off her and she didn't even know it was on her the whole time. I could relate to that woman heart and soul. It doesn't even matter that the story was written over a hundred years ago; it's still just as relevant today. I felt just like Louise when she realized she was free when I broke up with my daughter's father. It was like I could finally breathe again. I hadn't even known our relationship was that damaging to me until it was over, but looking back I see it was more bad than good. . . .  
(Katie Pruitt)



Louise Mallard is a married woman with a weak heart, and the story begins with her receiving the news of the death of her husband. Initially she weeps wildly in grief. When done, she sequesters herself in her room and seems to sort through her emotions. With some effort and as if there was a huge weight atop it, a newfound sense of freedom surfaces. This is the freedom of Mrs. Mallard's future without a husband and all the restrictions

applied to her life via the institution of marriage. As she comes to herself and prepares to face the world as a free woman, the door to her home opens and her husband lets himself in. Mrs. Mallard has a heart attack on the spot.

I appreciate this story for Kate Chopin's description of how someone who is resigned to the restrictions of her fate and station in life experiences the untangling and unfolding of her true self. To be able to feel what she honestly and truly wants as an adult woman, for the first time in her life, is an amazing and aptly named awakening.

(Billie Kelsey)



Kate Chopin's "Story of an Hour" tells about a woman who just found out that her husband might be dead. The story takes you along as she feels first sadness that she will be alone in life . . . but then she questions herself. Did I really love him? Would I miss having to answer to someone?

Now she has freedom. Just before she can enjoy her newfound freedom, her husband arrives to burst her bubble. It was too much of a shock to her and she dies. I like this story; it's somewhat like a thriller.

(Samantha East)

*. . . Students, to you 'tis given to  
scan the heights*

*Above, to traverse the ethereal  
space . . .*

*Still more, ye sons of science,  
should ye receive*

*The blissful news by  
messengers from heaven,*

*How Jesus' blood for your redemption flows...*

–Phillis Wheatley



I feel that Phillis Wheatley was a courageous woman. She demonstrated that a slave woman can be an excellent and smart writer. Also she was brave because she wrote



a poem to educated students at the University of Cambridge. Because she did all of that, people no longer thought it was impossible for an African American to read and write.

(Beatriz Mairena-Kellman)

*Not like the brazen giant of  
Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride  
from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset  
gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch...  
and her name  
Mother of Exiles. . . . –Emma Lazarus*



Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus" talks about the people of other countries that were poor or cast out from their countries. The light of the Statue of Liberty welcomes them from exile. She wants them to come and invites them. She does not want the rich or pompous. The New

Colossus wants to be everything the Old Colossus in Rhodes, Greece, was not. The Colossus in Greece was supposed to show the power and wealth of the tyrants of Greece. The poor had no real place there. The New Colossus is an idea as well as a sign of hope. It symbolizes to me the new world, new idea; rich or poor, no matter.

(Run Barlow)

*You may write me down in  
history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very  
dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.*



*Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.*

*... I am the dream and the hope of the slave.*

*I rise*

*I rise*

*I rise.* –Maya Angelou



Maya Angelou's "I Rise" says to me that you can put me down, hate me, and belittle me, but I will rise above it all because I believe in myself. I love myself and believe God has my back. I will not let anyone keep me from being me or change me to what they think I should be.

I love this poem because when I was younger I thought I was very sassy. People would try to bring me down by saying I was selfish or stuck up because at that time I was focused on my future and knew where I wanted to go. But I stopped focusing somewhere and stopped being Ms. Sassy K. Hopefully this class will bring it back out. If it does, that means I rise again and will not let anyone or anything make me fall. I will rise again! I rise!  
(Nkechi Johnson)

"I Rise" is Maya Angelou being expressive about her many personal challenges. She is seemingly angry. Although I think she is a brilliant writer, a lot of her works illustrate her frustrations within our current system. These personal challenges show a woman who is wise and strong, but I can't help but wonder if she was ever in an abusive relationship. The title "I Rise" expresses overcoming something or maybe someone. I like her strength and passion on issues that concern her and many other women in society. (Abraham Thomas)



"I Rise" by Maya Angelou exemplifies the strength and determination of both the author, whom I have always admired, and women in general. She is bold and sassy in this poem, yet she holds to what I believe are her core values:



freedom of speech, women's rights, individualism, artistic expression, and honesty. This poem is balanced and graceful in style and form. Personification and similes abound with graceful craftsmanship (or craftswomanship rather). The poem is simply awesome.

I loved this poem the first time I read it many years ago. I am thankful that Odyssey has brought this wonderful work of art back into my mind's eye and heart. Looking back in the history books and the memories that I have of 1978, the year in which this was published in her book of poetry, *And Still I Rise*, I find it inspiring that she seemed to feel immensely comfortable with herself, body, mind, and ability to express what most of us often find difficult. She is truly an inspirational woman.  
(Keith Johnson)

*The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world. He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise. He has compelled her to submit to laws in the formation of which she had no voice.* –Elizabeth Cady Stanton



Probably the most significant change Elizabeth Cady Stanton made to the Declaration of Independence in her Declaration of Sentiments is writing "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal."

... Everyone wants equality—women and slaves alike. Just as Thomas Jefferson highlighted acts of domination by his oppressors [the British monarchy], so did

Elizabeth Cady Stanton of her oppressors [men]. . . It may have taken some time, but women’s right to vote was achieved 72 years later. Now their voices are heard everywhere. **(Juba Moten)**



Elizabeth Cady Stanton stated that gender does not matter and that men and women should be treated equally. She also included how much damage men have caused women, and she blames men for ruining women’s dreams of being able to have respect, the right to be responsible in life, and the right

to vote. **(Linda Thao)**

*To women . . . this government is not a democracy. It is not a republic. It is an odious aristocracy; a hateful oligarchy of sex. . . . Are women persons? I hardly believe any of our opponents will have the hardihood to say they are not. Being persons, then, women are citizens; and no State has a right to make any law, or to enforce any old law, that shall abridge their privileges or immunities.*

—Susan B. Anthony



In “Are Women Persons?” Susan B. Anthony means by “oligarchy of sex” that women are ruled by men. She rebels against this practice because it strikes into the heart of all U.S. families. It would pit sister against brother, mother against husband, daughter against father, etc. The effects of that

kind of situation cannot possibly be good for the nation. She emphasizes the fact that women are half the population and deserve to be heard as much as men.

**(Katie Pruitt)**



the powerful exercised. **(Kenya Moses)**

Susan B. Anthony believed that a person’s sex should not allow them to rule or be an elite over another sex. Anthony thought that oligarchy of sex was unlawful and allowed the so-called stronger to rule over the weak and poor. She thought it was a mockery for women to be denied the rights that men or

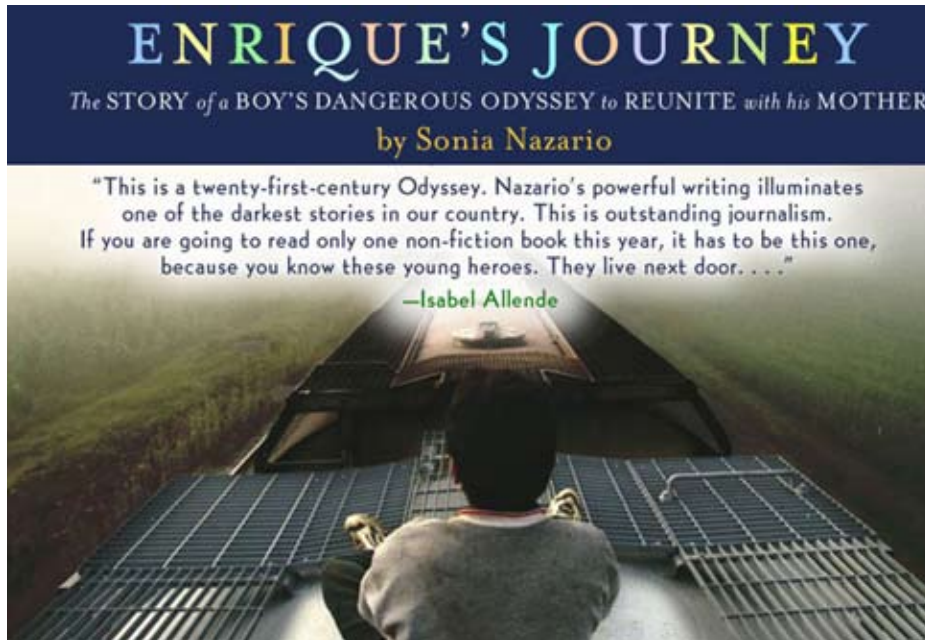


Susan B. Anthony can understand why the rich govern the poor and the educated govern the ignorant, but for men to have power over women is absurd. Men and women are created equal; therefore, one sex should not have power over another. **(Marcia Brown)**

*In all, I spent more than six months traveling in Honduras, Mexico, and the United States. . . . As I traveled in Enrique’s footsteps, I lived with the near-constant danger of being beaten, robbed, or raped. Once, as I rode on top of a fuel car on a rainy night with lightning, a tree branch hit me squarely in the face.—  
**Sonia Nazario***



I attended the reception [at Union South on October 27] for author Sonia Nazario. I learned many things from this woman and will say that humility is what I carried home with me. Her bravery, courage, perseverance to dream and conquer gave me so much hope. My heart’s desire is to one day conquer my dream as an established author. Her spirit was so humble. (Proverbs 15:33 “The fear



of the Lord is instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility.”)

Sonia Nazario’s adventures and all the labor she put into doing something she loved reflected discipline. She is not just the writer of the story *Enrique’s Journey*; she too is the story. I’m so happy to have had this opportunity to meet her. I was lifted so high in spirit.

**(Yolanda Cunningham)**



I attended Ms. Nazario’s class, reception, and talk at the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus on Thursday, October 27, 2011. Before attending her class I read her book *Enrique’s*

*Journey*.

In the afternoon class, I learned that immigrants are people who come to the United States for a strong reason. They leave everything that they know and love, like their families, to find work and support the families they left back home in their country. I learned that most of the single mothers leave behind children they love very

much. The mothers left them back home for long periods—for three to fourteen years—for the sake of finding work in the U.S. to support their families back home. . . .

I learned that most of the immigrants throughout their journey to the U.S. risk their lives. Some of them lose their lives on top of the trains, including children coming to find the mothers who left them behind. I learned that women suffer rape in their journey to arrive to the U.S.

After Sonia Nazario’s class, I had the opportunity to hug her and share some similar experiences as an immigrant that Ms. Nazario also states in her book.

At the reception, I was very happy to see her again. She is a smart and courageous woman of immigrant descent.

I learned from her evening talk that undocumented workers do hard work which is despised by Americans. Their work helps drive the economy. When she talked about the experiences of immigrants, people who attended the talk couldn’t believe the hardships and difficulties immigrants including children have to go through to come to the United States.

**(Beatriz Mairena-Kellman)**





OMG!! Sonia Nazario is a fantastic author. I enjoyed how [in her talk at Union South] she went deeper into her journey with riding the trains. What really stood out was how she started talking about taxes and Obama and how everyone should help in some way. She has a website we can go to and

give more support.  
**(Shaquida Johnson)**

I enjoyed the Wisconsin Public Radio interview Emily and Norman Gilliland did with Sonia Nazario, journalist and author of *Enrique's Journey*. I learned that Sonia Nazario's father moved here to Madison, Wisconsin, where she was born. The author said when she went to Guatemala she learned of the poverty there and that she could hardly breathe.



She wanted to experience the trip herself to see how dangerous it was. She took trains and discovered how truly dangerous it was for the children to be on top of trains. She faced gangsters who robbed and killed people. It's good she made back-up plans for herself that helped her along the way. The robbers also raped the children and took everything they had on them, even the telephone numbers where they could get in touch with their parent or parents when they got to the United States. The robbers would take the telephone numbers and blackmail the parents in America.

Author Sonia Nazario found out that there is 44% poverty in Guatemala. She also found out nothing would stop the migrants from coming to America. She said she would not take the trip today. Reports show 20,000 people are being killed, and 100,000 children have come to America.

Enrique made eight attempts to reach America. He was a boy determined to find his mother because receiving money and clothes wasn't enough for him. Therefore, he became rebellious. He knew that he had to find her. He had to find out if she still loved him. I say there's nothing like a mother's love for her children, and she will do all she can for her child or children.

**(Marilyn Johnson)**

